

April 14, 2016

I would like to thank Representative Price and the Education committee for taking testimony on the restraint and seclusion bills. I would also like to thank Representative Somerville as my story relates to his district.

My name is Dawn Reamer and I am a parent of a child that was restrained by his special education teacher. My son is a great kid. He is a Boyscout, a gymnast, a springboard diver, a swimmer, and an honor roll student. He is also on the autism spectrum. My son was in second grade when he was tied to the chair by his special education teacher, Lisa Bennett. He was just 7 years old. He was not tied to a chair because he was acting out or a safety risk to other students. He was tied to a chair simply because he was in the classroom. (Attachment 1) There was a paraprofessional in the room along with the teacher and the other adult. They abused my child. By the end of second grade my child was saying that he "Didn't want to be a person anymore", that he didn't want to be alive. I didn't know where his anxiety was coming from. He could not verbalize it like other seven year olds. A parent went to the Principal after observing the incident, but no one told me. I did not find out that this had happened until 2 ½ years later when he was finally able to find the words to tell me what Mrs. Bennett had done to him. At this time the parent verified that she had witnessed him being tied to the chair. My son told me it happened at least 10 times. He was in Lisa Bennett's classroom for 3 years. The district has admitted it happened at least once and the school does not think it was a big deal. It was a big deal for my child.

I wish that I could say that I went to the Superintendent Richard Naughton and that it was handled appropriately. I wish that I could say that somebody cared and was willing to address my concern. Instead I received confirmation that the incident had happened and that my son never have behaviors that would have justified restraint.(See Attachment A). I also learned that at least one device used to restrain my son remained in the classroom until last year. This means that other students were likely being restrained. When I asked for the district to take corrective action none came. They refused to document this incident in the teacher's file or implement any sort of policy that would prevent such incident from happening again. The District has not even had the decency to apologize to me or my child. Instead, when I appeared before the Board, Alice Ferguson, Board Member, was quick to point out that special education had improved considerably during the last 30 years and completely dismissed the concern.

I reported the concern to the Michigan Department of Education and the Office of Civil Rights. They refused to even look at the concern because I did not report it within a short time period after when the incident, that I did not know about, occurred. When I approached Lt. Governor Calley, who I view as a friend to special education students, I was told that what happened to my son was not illegal.

The Huron School District was permitted to abuse my child. When I tried to address my concern at my IEP, Instead of demonstrating any accountability, the Director of Special Education, Thomas Arkwright, attacked me and accused me of slander in front of the IEP team. This was the worst IEP I have ever experienced. Parents should not have hostility directed at them for trying to address serious concerns

involving their child. Following the IEP team meeting I made a hard decision. My son and I have been living in an apartment in a new district while we prepare our house for sale. Following the IEP it was clear that my son has experienced retaliation and that it would continue. I had to move him out of the Huron School District or any school that is a part of the Cooperative for Special Education including Huron, Flat Rock, Grosse Ile and Gibraltar.

I would like to call your attention to one more point. In the letter, Superintendent says that the device was not used as a restraint. The device in question secured my child to a chair. There was not a prescription issued for the device, it was not ordered for my child and it was used without my knowledge or consent or even consent from my son. He was restrained, regardless of how the superintendent chooses to characterize it. Use of any mechanical restraint, regardless of alleged purpose, should be viewed with disapproval. The district made excuses but in the end the district admitted that my son was restrained with no remorse, apology or guarantee that it would never happen again.

I don't know what is worse. The fact that my child was restrained, the fact that the District refused to recognize that what it did was wrong, or the fact that there are likely other things that happened to my child while in Lisa Bennett's classroom that I still don't know about.

I am here today because the law needs to change. It is not ok to abuse children simply because they have an IEP. The Supreme Court has said that children don't leave their constitutional rights at the schoolhouse door. The right to life and liberty is the most fundamental of these rights. Laws against assault, battery, false imprisonment, kidnapping, and child abuse should apply to all students. The current situation is dehumanizing to persons with disabilities. Please don't let any other family have the same experience. We can do better than this. Don't let the Huron School District or the Downriver Cooperative for Special Education or any other school in Michigan continue to harm students.

Thank you for allowing me to testify and for your support of the bills regarding the use seclusion and restraint in the State of Michigan.

Please let me know if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Dawn A. Reamer
Concerned Parent and Citizen
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RICHARD A. NAUGHTON
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November 24, 2014

Mrs. Dawn Reamer
23275 Merriman Road
New Boston, MI 48154

Dear Mrs. Reamer:

On Monday, November 12, 2014, we met at Central office at noon to address your concerns regarding an incident that occurred in February of the 2011-2012 school year. You invited Judith Richards, Kevin's psychologist and I asked Debra Krauss, the district's Curriculum Director to sit in on the meeting.

The incident was first brought to my attention on Thursday, October 2, 2014, by another parent. The parent informed me that you knew about the incident two weeks prior but she made you a promise not to bring your concern to me until after her meeting on October 2nd. On Monday, October 6th 2014, I played my voice messages from over the weekend. You stated that you and Kevin had a discussion about tying his shoes; this led to Mrs. Bennett tying him to a chair. You also had concerns from your discussion with Kevin that Miss Donna the classroom aide had made him cross his arms. You also expressed concern knowing this information that Dr. Kathi Tarrant-Parks, Kari Grunwald and Jason Zewatsky once mentioned to you three years ago that they were surprised that Kevin was still in the Miller A.I. program.

A complete and thorough investigation was conducted. Interviews were held with teacher Lisa Bennett, Donna Suemnick – aide, Kelly Suemnick – aide, Julia Bordeau – aide, Tom Arkwright, Director of Special Education, and Amy McQuiston, former Principal of Miller Elementary. Mr. Arkwright contacted Dr. Kathi Tarrant-Parks, Kari Grunwald and Jason Zewatsky. I conducted a phone interview with Deborah Gershune, former Occupational Therapist.

After the complete investigation, these are my findings: Mrs. Bennett received a highly involved student in November of 2011. Mrs. Bennett and the student's mother were working very hard on establishing safe behavior. There was a belief that sensory integration could help this student. The mother often presented ideas on a daily basis and Mrs. Bennett and the classroom aides often brainstormed ideas to help the student with his behavior. Deborah Gershune, Occupational therapist, worked on building a sensory diet plan for at school and home.

In January of 2012, Mrs. Bennett and Donna Suemnick discussed a piece of sensory integration named a chair hugger. They felt the equipment would help the student with extra trunk support and sensory processing, that deep pressure would be calming and organizing. This piece of equipment is sold by Abilitations, A School Specialty Company, School Specialty Marketplace, Assistivetechnet, Amazon, Sears, Autism Products and Manison School Supplies. It is a soft pliable lycra band. It is clearly not intended as a restraint but it provides deep pressure and proprioceptive input while a student is seated as well as additional trunk support. Again, it was not used or intended as a restraint.

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Attachment A

In mid-February of 2012, during the IEPC meeting, Deborah Gershune was reviewing the elements of the student's sensory diet used at school. She covered the use of the chair hugger and the mother had questions. The following week the mother asked Mrs. Bennett to demonstrate the use of the chair hugger. Mrs. Bennett remembers this demonstration. The mother did not like it and asked Mrs. Bennett to stop using it. Mrs. Bennett fully complied with the mother's wishes. Mrs. Bennett also had the chair hugger put away and informed the classroom para pro's not to use the equipment any longer.

The mother did state to me that Kevin was the student that Mrs. Bennett used for the demonstration. Mrs. Bennett remembers the demonstration but not the student. Kelly Suemnick remembers being in the classroom when the demonstration occurred, but cannot remember which student. Donna Suemnick and Julia Bordeau have no memory of the incident. Donna does remember Mrs. Bennett telling her not to use the equipment any longer. Deborah Gershune removed the chair hugger from the student's sensory diet and that was confirmed in an email to the mother dated February 24, 2012. Mrs. McQuiston, Miller Principal knew of the IEPC meeting, the mother's concerns, the demonstration and its discontinued use.

There was also concern that Donna had asked Kevin to cross his arms. You assumed that Donna placed Kevin into a restraint hold. Mrs. Bennett and Donna Suemnick have absolutely no memory of this. Mrs. Bennett and all three classroom aides stressed that Kevin never exhibited any behaviors that would warrant CPI intervention.

As stated earlier, Mr. Arkwright contacted Dr. Kathi Tarrant-Parks, Kari Grunwald and Jason Zewatsky. All of these individuals do not remember encountering you and stating that they were surprised that Kevin was still in the Miller A.I. Program. Two of the staff members offered that a comment like that would have been inappropriate and unprofessional.

In closing, I hope this letter addressed all of your concerns. I will share this report with the Board of Education members. I am willing to share this report with Judith Richards but a Release of Information form needs to be completed and signed, first. As always, Kevin's teachers will do their best to provide him an excellent education.

Sincerely,



Richard Naughton
Superintendent of Schools

cc: Huron Board of Education Members